Informant: LMP-S23 **English**
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S23: Did portraits all my life because that is what I had at my disposal when I started; when I was a little kid I would draw on everything mostly school paper or meat wrapping paper. So in school I was the designated artist; I don't have any of those early pieces, my teachers kept them. So I've been painting portraits most of my, I would say all of my life. In the last few years I've, I've been connected with Self Help Graphics so in a, on, in a professional venue so I've just been working and actually accumulating a body of work. I show some pieces in group shows. I've only had one show where, where I had all my work. Well it was with three women and I did a lot of work for that show, mostly watercolors.

CH: Wow!

S23: I learned watercolors. I used to use watercolors but I didn't really know them because they were easy to get and they were inexpensive, but then a friend of mine, her name is Jos--she's a professional artist from Mexico I met in 1968--she, I met her in Plaza de la Raza, I went to one of her workshops and then we became friends and she mentored me and, and encouraged me that to buy some good materials and start working at least once good paper. Well, when I became a teacher, of course I started to work on get some quality materials to work on and she encouraged me to explore the watercolor and so I really love that media and uh I've been using primarily water color and at Self Help Graphics since 1989 I started doing the altars which is another story, but the visual art, the painting, I started taking, going to workshops there. What happens, the workshops are artists who are already established artists and some beginners and some who are not artists. It's open, it's an open kind of workshop, but they have artists who, who uh, who lead the workshops in printmaking and that has been a very fascinating media, I really, it's very challenging, especially the monoprint silk screens which are done very fast. You have to work at least less than a half hour because the inks dry quickly and then a printer prints the image from the silk screen and so I've been doing that for some years. But I've continued with the watercolors and I've, you know, I've learned along the way to, of course watercolors I've discovered a few years ago, they fade, some colors fade more than others so I have them on this wall because I had some of the ones I had on that wall have really, the sun has even the--I only get direct sun early in the morning up until 9 o' clock, 9:30 and uh they need to be out of the daylight, direct light. So these are watercolors.

CH: These three.

S23: Yes, uh, this one is one of a series of goddesses. I'm very interested in Mayan culture and traditions and legends, everything Maya because I attribute my background to Mayans and I'll tell you about her she's uh (inaudible) of the family, she was a my aun--

lady who raised my mother. She was my mother's; she called her her grandmother. So this is one of the goddesses I call her, I think she's Chilonen, I have to remember.

CH: Chilonena?

S23: Chilonen.

CH: Chilonen.

S23: Chilonen in the deity for uh the goddess, the female deity, and of course she represents fertility, earth, so you can see the corn symbol everywhere and this is a watercolor. I, I have another one, but that one has, I need to repaint it because it has, it was, I had it, someone, I lent it to uh, in fact, a senator's office, he was interested in having some work of mine and it faded so much that uh, I, it dS23sn't even look like what I, the colors. This one I've had here the whole time, but blues, the blues and reds fade quite a lot, especially blues.

CH: This is not the one that was in the senator's office?

S23: No, no, not this one.

CH: I was gonna say because the colors look really vibrant.

S23: Although I feel that it has lost a little bit of its original vibrancy. And then this one is one that I did for my, uh, in honor of my mother. I did an altar that I, I, a symbolic bed representing my mother and my mother's, well her love, and the status that I held her in. This was a little painting I painted at the head of the bed, it was part of the headboard and uh so her name was Guadalupe (Phone rings)

MJ: Wanna get that?

S23: Yeah. . . . So I actually started with this one. I think I painted that about five years ago. It's a little damaged. The place where I exhibited it was in Olvera Street, the gallery there, it rained and it leaked and it leaked right up over the bed and it caught some, but I left it, I didn't change it--

CH: --Oh, I see.

S23: I said well that's part of, that's part of it. It ran a little bit; the reds ran.

CH: It looks really, really vibrant still.

S23: Oh thank you. Yeah, it has been out of the light. So I probably, sometimes I use the same concept in a different media or a different size so this is one that I intend to, to, to do again in a bit probably, in a larger size. And then this one is also dedicated to, to my mother. It isn't her exactly but she kind of resembled her at the end, but it was an

ofrenda (offering) and it was also for, I think I did this in 1993 the first time I, I installed an altar at a gallery in Olvera Street. I've been there almost every year; I've missed a couple of years and I really like doing that there because the people who come there, many of them are Mexican, but people from all over the world and so I feel it's good to have that kind of uh, not exposure for me, but exposure for the tradition, yeah. And so this one is just called "Ofrenda de Gladiolas," "Gladiola offering." And so it's kind of a memory piece, these two. I've done several. The one, I have a small watercolor, but it's kind of faded and I have that one in my room. That was for, it's actually my mother's portrait, and I used it in an altar also.

CH: I like how you've placed them, placed them together on the wall, it, it just seems like it kind of belongs that way.

S23: Yeah, I have this collection that uh (mic muffled, inaudible) so I have Guadalupe's and, and angels, I love those, but they're rustic and earthy, I just love them. And then my daughter just gave me (mic muffled; inaudible) it's a grandmother and it's by Josefina Aguilar--

CH: Oh, it's great.

S23: --it's wonderful. Her, her um, her pieces are, are just really, you know uh, not, they're gruesos (thick), they're not fine-tuned, they're just very (mic muffled, inaudible).

MJ: Okay. So what are, what were you saying about this one then?

S23: Well, this little collection is by the potter Josefina Aguilar from Oaxaca and I really love her work, it's very rustic and uh, un--unrefined, I guess you can say. My daughter just gave this one to me, she was in, actually she, I think she bought it in New Mexico and uh, I'm very happy, that's now another favorite piece. But her who--Josefina Aguilar's whole family--are potters so when you see their signing, if it's not J Aguilar it's one of her sons of her daughter in law, I believe.

CH: That's great.

S23: The this Guadalupe--I have Guadalupe's everywhere--this one I bought recently and it's from the Taraumara and it's from a piece of bark and I just love this work.

CH: Nice. Very nice.

S23: Yeah, and this is kind of my little collection here. My mother and my step dad, who was like my father, a wonderful man. My daughter and she was her wedding day the day before early in the morning, before that.

CH: It's a cute picture.

S23: Yeah, and this is my, my mother. This was in 1983 and this is my uncle, he was a veteran and he died in 1985. My aunt from Chicago. My mother originated or rather emigrated to Chicago cuz' that's where her mother was. Oh, this is my uncle when he was in the service in the War World II; he was an artist too and he used to sing beautifully, uncle Frank. And uh, I have a lot of my mother here (laughs) as you might see.

CH: Yeah. I read, I read something um where it talked about how a lot of, like during the 1960's and the whole Chicano movement, a lot of people really just started to looking into their own families for influence and, you know, when I talk to you I think, "wow! this is, this is how it is, this is how it was," because how you tell me when your mom influenced you so much in the art, like she didn't call herself an artist, but yet everything she did was artistic.

S23: Yes, and that was all my life, you know. By the 60's and 70's I, well, I was already married, I already had, let's see, by the seventies I had all my nine children already. That's when I went back to school uh, to, you know, to take on my career as a teacher, but uh all my life my mother has been my influence. Now she was brought up by this lady; she called her momma Pola. In fact, I wanna go, this is one of, one of my missions is to go to Guanimaro (sp ?) and find her, her, where she's buried. I believe that's where she is. She went back to Mexico in the thirties during the expatriation of uh immigrants, Mexicans, and uh she wasn't, she wasn't sent by the government, she, she just chose to leave. She said I want to go die in my, in my country and not die in this barbarous--barbaric country, she called it (laughs)--she thought it was very crude for people to be sent because they were from Mexico. And so she, her name was Ipolita Tinoco, my, or known as mamma Pola and this is she; this little Mayan lady here, I don't know if you can see it, there's a lot of reflection here. This is in 1927, my brother was--my mother, and mamma Pola and my brother went to Mexico after he was born, before he was a month old, to his father's birthplace. But his father left them there and came back to the United States and they were there three and a half years; He didn't pick--go for them. So this was in Nochistlan (sp?) and mamma Pola raise my mother, my grandmother and my great grandmother. Circumstances in their life left these infants without their mother. In one case the mother was killed. The other two cases I'm not too sure, that's a fuzzy part of the history that I don't know--my mother said she didn't know--you know, what ever it is.

CH: Yeah.

S23: So mamma Pola got to, you know, to care for my brother up to uh probably by the time he was five and she was already in her nineties when I was born. And she went back to Mexico like right after I was born. I was born in 1932 and she left, went back, approximately 1933.

CH: So you had a chance to spend some time with her even though--

S23: Oh yes, I have a photograph of her holding me with my brother standing there. She was a very tough woman.

CH: That's nice.

S23: You know, self made woman who, that's why my mother was so independent and strong and uh she has quite a story. Some day I think I'll, well I'm afraid to narrate it because my kids say you really have to tell us cuz' I, my mother would tell her story over and over, especially the events of, in the activities of building the altars. She learned that from her and then she had learned it from her, her ances--

CH: --from mamma Pola

S23: Yeah. So it's, it's really a rich history I believe.

CH: --history. Yeah.

S23: And as you see I collect a lot of things. I like folk art, especially from Mexico, but I collect art from (inaudible). This is an African panel I have a couple of them. I really love the colors, it reminds me of the Mexican tradition, just bright colors.

CH: --it kind of makes, yeah, it makes me think of the Kuna Yala. Did you see that at the Fowler, they had that Kuna Yala exhibit a couple of years ago.

S23: Yeah. Well, I, I have some Kuna, some molas and I don't have them out here because I haven't, yeah, just got them to put out here. One of my friend's made pillows with them. The only thing is that they wear so maybe I display them sometimes on the chairs, but only for short times. But of course I, a lot of things people have given me because like my birthdays, you know, this and this. This is, when I was about ten, my mother brought this from Guanajuato and then later when I was married she gave it to me and she said, "look this is from my tierra. I wanna give it to you," so this is a treasure. And it's uh, it's, it's very fragile, it's low fired clay but it's actually a little, is it a bank?--

CH: --piggy bank--

S23: --Or no? Yeah.

CH: Yeah, I see the little hole near the head.

S23: Yeah, it's a little bank. And she had it in her kitchen there while I was, you know, at home. So this is a treasured piece (laughs).

CH: It's cute, I love it.

S23: Isn't it? And my mother said they had, they have all animals, you know, with uh, with uh, the babies.

CH: Yeah, it's great, it's a great piece. That one up there is from Guatemala?

S23: Yes.

CH: It's nice.

S23: And this I, I made. I didn't make the little furniture, but I, one year I made a few of these little home altars and I gave them to my children so I have a couple of them left.

CH: It's cute.

S23: I paint a lot of Guadalupe's, it's one of my--

CH: Do you practice Catholicism? Do you go to church?

S23: Yes, I do. I, especially in the last uh ten or twelve years (phone rings). My son--he got it, is it (inaudible). This is the only serigraph I've done and of course it was in honor of Cesar Chavez. I did that in 1994 and I haven't had an opportunity to do another one. It has nine colors and it was done at Self Help Graphics and I call it "Cesar Vive" and so the calaveras (skeletons) represent, you know, the earth, but the rebirth as the plant is growing out of the earth and the retoños, the new sprouts, below are the people who will carry on his work so he, even though he has in, he has, he's living in the cause and in the legacy he left. So, that's my Cesar Vive.

CH: It's very bright colors!

S23: Yeah. Yes, afterwards I thought, "god, I used very primary colors," but--

CH: --I think it looks great!

S23: --It's quite strong.

CH: It's great.

S23: Yeah.

MJ: Okay.

S23: Well, of course this is part of my gallery. If I put all my photographs, I would have wall to wall, you wouldn't, you wouldn't see the walls. So I keep these, these were like the, some of the early pictures my kids, and uh, so I just left them, but you know, I get one every year from all of them so I, well I'm putting them in albums now. My, one of my daughters put this collage together. When I retired I had, we had a picnic to celebrate my retirement and I said, "gosh I, I get old right before my eyes in this one." (CH laughs) You know I have several years there. And you know one of my granddaughters;

she's a very good artist. I had a, my wonderful loving dog was put to sleep this year, in March. But she had done this--it was a pitbull--and she, she called him Huero Esparza and gave it to me, uh! It's, it's even hard for me to tell it, talk about it, but it's a treasure. And uh, all my life I've, all my married life, I've, I've loved cobalt blue china and pottery so I collected or I get gifts so that I have lots of things like that. And so my son has, he dS23s a lot of the, my uh, grants a lot of my desires about what I want so, but I need space so he added these shelves for me.

CH: Oh, that's nice.

S23: He's dS23s--oh, you can't see it from here--he's a very creative person, he's an artist. He dS23s things with wood and construction. So he, he made these little villages. There's one at Self Help Graphics; he, he put it up for sale, but he mostly gave us all one, one year, one year or another and I really love it. I love miniatures.

CH: Yeah.

S23: And so he did all that.

CH: Is he the son that's gonna be helping you?--

S23: Yes.

CH: --with altars now--

S23: Javier. The one who's been here a while.

CH: Yeah, yeah, that was here with Elena adjusting him that one time.

S23: Yes, yes.

CH: Okay.

S23: That's Javier. He lives here. It seems like they all do, but he's the one who lives here all the time. (we laugh)

MJ: So this is an altar of you as a teacher.

S23: Yes, it's kind of a prototype. When I was a teacher I made one. It wasn't this elaborate, it was just basic and I had it in my, I brought it to school to, to, you know, talk about the altar making and so then children make little comparable ones. And then they, they added their photographs and so we had a, a classroom altar and so then I started, you know, adding to it and refurbishing it. So I use it when I do lectures or slide presentations cuz' it, so I, I , I, if I have a little table I create a little altar, but it's all in miniature so I don't--

CH: --Nice!

S23: --and uh, so I have left it on, it'actually--

CH: It's got everything; it's got papel picado, everything!

S23: It has. And I made all their little dishes and things from clay and it's all cardboard, it's, I really like this media. I've been, in fact, now that I do workshops this is what I have the students do. What ever they can, for the amount of time and I, I, I just bring anything that add. They even add photographs or magazine pictures. Sometimes they're very, very tiny. I just put away, I had a little sample of the little boxes. So, uh, so it's basic--this one I didn't even cover in papier mache, but the ones that I have the students do they start out with a box and then they cover it with uh, with paper and then paint it and then add what ever they can to it. And depending on their age, some are just very basic and, you know, especially adults, they wanna do something like this. It takes a long time, you can't do it in one session. So I just get them started and they can finish it at home. But when I've done--

CH: --You give them the basics.

S23: Yeah. When I've done, I did one for Plaza de la Raza last year and I had a two week workshop and one of the women made a large one in honor of the, the firemen who died at the, at the towers. It was very beautiful and then it was, it just became--it was quite large, it was about this big--and so then the other students, especially the children, they helped make flowers for it so it became a little project for more than one person.

CH: Oh, that's nice, that's great.

S23: And I have my mother in there.

CH: Did you make this one as well?

S23: No, my friend did. She--

CH: Oh, she (inaudible)--

S23: Yeah, she used the, the raton (mouse). She, she makes a lot of pretty things. I buy a lot of things from her. We buy from each other or exchange. Actually we exchange more than anything. So I have such a collection of Guadalupes. That's another one of my little altars (altars) with the miniature furniture.

CH: Oh, I see. That's nice. That's a beautiful plate too, that yellow one.

S23: Oh, I just got my br--

CH: That is so nice!

S23: --my son just brought it from Guanajuato. My sister gave this one to me from Guanajuato and then he just got back last month and oh, I was really happy to get that. (laughs)

CH: That's great! That is beautiful.

S23: So I'm getting a collection here.

CH: Yeah.

S23: Yeah. I made this one. This is one of the cardboard things, but that was for another project for Our Lady of Guadalupe.

CH: Nice.

S23: But I like Guadalupes.

CH: Do you have, do you find a, a connection with Guadalupe? Do you have a special connection with her?

S23: Oh yes, very much so. Well, one, one reason I was brought up with that um, my mother had such as devotion to her. Her name was Guadalupe. She celebrated her birthday on the 12th. She thought that was her birthday because she was named Guadalupe, because that's a tradition, you know, in Mexico especially. But when she became a citizen, she waited til she was almost, oh, very advanced, eighty years old or so to send for her baptismo certificate and she was actually born November 19, but she never changed. We still celebrated her birthday on--

CH: --October--

S23: --on the, on the--

CH: --December 20, I mean 12--

S23: --12th, but you know, of course the one, some of the family they couldn't get used to that was her birthday so I would, of course, honor her real birthday, but her big cel--or the recognition was the 12th.

CH: the 12th, yeah.

S23: But we, she invoked everything to Our Lady. This one I called, I call, I think it's grandmother's garden. And uh, things that I, things that are very important in my mother's garden. Mostly, mostly the comestibles, but the maguey (century plant) is a very strong icon in my family, for me anyway, and the nopales que no falten (cactus, may we not lack them). Then this one too, I had done this one first--when you get over here--

CH: That's nice too.

S23: Yeah.

CH: I really love the effect of the border, it's very nice.

S23: I do too, I really like them, so I've been doing them. And it affords me uh, um, just to add a little bit of more explanation to my, the image that I do.

CH: Yeah.

MJ: Do you grow many of these things, plants in your garden, do you not?

S23: Yes, yes. In my, in the front yard there was always nopales (cacti) and magueys (century plant)--well, I still have a small maguey--but when my, after my mother died, my brother cleared the yard and cut them all. It was heart breaking for me cuz' I thought, "oh, my mother would want them." And she had several cacti. She had one called pitayo (sp?), which is the, like the organ cactus, it grows really tall, because that was uh, she had, she said when she was a child the fence was one of tho--that was used as a fence.

CH: --pitayo--

S23: --it was used as a fence, yeah. And so she had things that she had all her life: the magueys, the nopales, the pitayo, the guayaba tree. They're all symbolic! (laughs) to her and so I think this one I call my mother's garden, this is abu--no, my mother's garden abuelita's garden, it was just a generic abuelita's garden.

CH: It's great. And both are watercolor.

MJ: And when did you paint them?

S23: uh, I, this one is more recent. I believe this was '97 and I painted that in '99.

MJ: Oh, very recently. And you made this (inaudible)--

S23: --yes, uh, huh, this is, these little niches, I've been making a few of them. I give some to my children or friends when I, gifts. And then some of the work here is from friends of mine who do this work, but I, I really, I, I think I did the, the, I did the hearts. So, hearts and, and these little hearts. These I bought; my friend made this one. This, this is the same artist; they sell them at Self Help Graphics.

CH: Oh, that's great. I wanna go check out their new, they have a, a gallery, a new gallery show, gallery showing. I don't remember the theme, but I know I--

S23: --At Self Help Graphics?

CH: Yeah.

S23: Yeah, it's on the Boyle Heights.

CH: It's the Boyle Heights!?

S23: A lot of, a lot of photographs and there's some nice work. It's a, it's a nice--

CH: --Gotta see that before October!

S23: Yeah. It's so dusty! When I retired, one of my parents made this. She's quite an artist on pastillaje, it's like bread dough, and she gave this to me, I thought it was so cute. It's like a portrait of me! (laughs) Really charming.

CH: That is so cute. Are these little magueys?

S23: Yeah. This one was in my mother's collection for her nacimiento and then I made these when I had a, this Guadalupe display, but, so that's one that I treasure.

CH: Are they made--

S23: --She had several, but, but I have them in the nacimiento things, but I kept one out.

CH: Are they made out of paper?

S23: Uh, I, I, this is. I think it's, yeah it's like cardboard.

CH: Cardboard. . . . corrugated.

S23: So I use a lot of cardboard to make things, I love to do that. Course I collect dolls, as you can see, especially cloth dolls and uh, then I, my grandchildren and my kids, you know, left, would leave their little, those little toys and I hated to--some of them were just so, I had never really paid attention to them--so I just put them away and then one day I said, "I have a little collection" (CH laughs) and so I put them in my, in my case, but you see I need a lot of room. Many of these dolls have been given to me, but my mother made some Indian dolls um, that I, that I treasure. I have a antique Mexican doll, but it's back there. It was in her, in part of her things, it's this one. And this was her doll, it wasn't mine, she had, she kept it.

CH: A little one.

S23: Yeah, oh, see it's an old doll. This is the typical Mexican, the national costuming, China poblana, there's quite a legend that gS23s with it.

CH: Is it like chi--from Guana--Guanajuato?

S23: Poblana from Puebla.

CH: Oh, from Puebla.

S23: Puebla, Puebla. That's why she's called Poblana. According to the legend, this uh, the trade with China brought this ex-princess or someone and, I can't remember exactly how it went, but she missed her costumes so she made this costume with, with glitter or sequence, I guess, and silk, but she made it in a Mexican style so it became, that's how it originated they say. She mar--she was sold actually to marry a, a landowner here, in Mexico, but she kept her tradition and so they call her la China Poblana.

MJ: Okay. And you have--

S23: Oh, yeah I have some over here.

MJ: --other things in the living room there.

S23: Now these are prints. I think this one I did, I think, two years ago. This is called a colograph, in fact, these two are colographs. A colograph, it's, this is uh, was a different media for me. This was the first one. Actually this is the one I like best. But I did this when my husband died, it was in his memory and I call it passages. So there's a lot of symbolism. I call myself the, or I have, for myself, I have called the, the hummingbird as my spirit animal and so it's a passage, you know, the empty chair of course, he's no longer there so it's very, a very special piece for me. A colorgraph is you make a plate on a hard surface, it becomes the plate to print with and you can build it up, it's kind of, kind of make it a little more dimensional, you can add things to it and then you ink it and then print it on a press. And this one I think I, I--drop they call it--drop, dropping is everytime you pass it through the, through the press about twelve drops, so it has many layers and so it, it, I look, it has the effect of an oil painting, but actually it's layers of, of ink printed applied to this colograph plate. This is the same process; this is very simple. Again it's the, the hummingbird, colibri. Colibri is the, I'm not sure if it's nahuatl for the hummingbird. It's one, but there's others, Tzinsun, tzinsunsin--

CH: --Tzinzunzin, I think, yeah.

S23: --is another word. I'm not sure if that's Zapoteca or what, but--

CH: I've heard colibri cuz' that's what my family says.

S23: Yeah, so, so that's what that one's called. The maguey is there as well, well, the maguey is the main plant.

CH: But colibri is also supposed to be symbolic of love.

S23: Oh, yes, it is, very symbolic; it's very, it's a very important (inaudible).

CH: I like it, this is great, I think it's good, good techniques.

S23: But when, it looks three dimensional, but when you, it's, it's actually a flat surface, but it, it pu--the way, when it's printed it has that feel of dimension.

CH: It's nice.

S23: Thank you.

CH: It's that a maguey plant?

S23: Yes, a ha. And here it is in flower.

CH: And you have the little hand.

S23: That's a very ancient symbol in Native American, throughout the Americas north of--

MJ: Okay.

S23: And the next one is a monoprint, silkscreen monoprint and I have a lot of work there cuz for the last seven years I, I've been printing monoprints. I don't get a chance to do it often cuz' that's one of the projects or the printmaking that gS23s on in Self Help Graphics and there's many, so many more artists that come to do this. You have to have an appointment and an opening and when sister Karen the director that's when I first started doing this. And this one is called "Scent of Marigolds" and it was a piece for day of the dead. I think this was 94-5, 95 I think and uh, oh no, is this, yeah "Scent of Marigolds." I did two pieces, companion pieces, with a similar concept and I called that one "Constant Companion."

CH: "Constant Companion." It's nice too. Very bright, vivid, colors.

S23: That's monoprint, really lends itself to very bright colors so I use a lot of them and I have my portfolio if you wanna see some of them, mostly the monoprints.

CH: It's great. I like your quilt too.

S23: Oh, thank you. One of my friends, she's Chinese. I really love the work. It's actually a vest, but I like to display it as a coat. As you see I collect dolls. Actually I got these dolls for my grandchildren, but they say, "why don't you keep them in your house grandma," I guess they don't play with dolls anymore, but I love the doll, I, I've always loved dolls. When I was a little kid my mother, I remember getting a beautiful doll. She was blonde, it was a baby doll with, you know, ruffles, bonnet and all that and then for about three years she would make a complete new outfit and give me that for Christmas. I was very happy and somebody said, "gosh, you were ripped," no, not at all, I appreciated it, it just was like a new doll for me cuz' it had a new outfit. So, it was--

CH: --it was hand made, it was made for you--

S23: --I love that idea. Yeah. It was hand made, with all the, you know, the underpants, the, the dress, the bonnet, the shS23s, it was a wonderful gift. I couldn't find that doll after my mother died. I don't know what she did with that because after I got married I had four boys first so I told her, "why don't you keep it for me," and then after I wanted it I, she couldn't find it; she had un cuartito lleno de cosas (room filled with stuff), all her stuff, that's why I have so many things.

CH: My mom has a garage full of mine and my sister's stuff.

S23: She had this little addition made to put all her boxes. Course she had all her nacimiento things, but I have doubled everything already (laughs)

MJ: So you had four sons first and then how many daughters?

S23: I had five daughters. I have five daughters now.

MJ: What, what age is Elena?

S23: Elena, she's the se-the second to last, she's number 8 and she's thirty-five, I believe.

MJ: Really?

CH: Your daughters all pretty much look just like you.

S23: They resemble me, huh?

CH: Yeah, yeah, they do. Especially, I think, well maybe because I've spent more time with Elena, but she looks very much like you.

S23: Yeah, yeah she dS23s. People always recognize the resemblance.

CH: Yeah, I think it's good.

MJ: Okay. And then you have photographs on the, over here to your left--

S23: --Oh, yes--

MJ: What uh, it's a lot of hard work.

S23: This is my grandfather and this is the original. I made a copy that I've used in the altars and actually I wanna put this away cuz' it, it, it's really fragile. Ooh, it's dusty. Oops! (laughs) And so I made, I made such a good copy of it, isn't that?

CH: That is a good copy.

S23: Except that it's larger and it dS23sn't stand by itself so I put this one here. But this was an old style of, on these lithographs on tin; it's almost like a big badge and this was in my mother's, our house, since I was a little kid--

CH: --That's great.--

S23: --and so this is my grandfather. He was born in 1879 and this is my father. And I just found a--should've dusted it first--he was from Guanajuato. I didn't get to know him very well. My mother and he divorce when I was about 8 years old, but I kept in contact with him. Then I lost many years until he was very ill in a hospital. Then I, I was called and I, my ki--some of my older children got to meet him. I visited him a few times before he died. He was a musician. He introduced me to Eng--reading in English and Spanish when I, before I went to school. He used to read the, of course during the war in Europe he would always have the newspaper and he would, so I would look over his shoulder and I would say well, and I would say, "you could read that!" You know and, and he'd say yeah. So then he would read a sentence and then I could catch the word the twice so then I would go, "look, the! the!" (laughs) I'd go though all the paper and little by little I learned to read a little bit, but I was speaking English, yes.

MJ: Okay.

S23: And he was a musician. And this is my husband and I on our wedding picture. We got married in 1951.

CH: Great picture.

S23: Thank you. I, I was out of high school in 1950 and so we got married ve-verry young, I was, I had just turned 19, I think; he was a year older. But the, when we went to get our license the clerk said, "you're the oldest looking under age young man I've seen," cuz' he was a tall man, he was six foot and he was already, by the time we were in 9th grade, he was already a, a you know, a large, big guy; he was an athlete. This is my mother and my step-dad. She traveled to Mexico many times and he was a lovely man, very gentle. So my youngest brother is, is his son, their son. My sister and I at a, we were in a wedding. I think I'm about 2 ½ there. My sister is a year younger. No, I think I was three and she's two. That's right.

CH: It's a cute picture, you guys look like dolls. (we laugh)

MJ: What's this piece with the eagle and the?

S23: This is Elena's boy friend gave it-brought it--to me.

CH: Otto?

S23: Yes, Tudor, Tudor--

CH: --Tudor. Sorry.

S23: And um, he's immersed in the Native American spirituality. He actually practices. He's very serious about that in his whole life, everything he does. And then so this, natural medicine, is part of, you know, just dovetails with that. And so he, he brought that to me before they left. Well when I came back--I went to Ensenada for three days--and they had been, they were gone, they left on, on Tuesday, I was back on Thursday and this was here and I said who's is this, oh, that Tudor, that's your gift from Tudor. That's nice.

CH: That's nice.

MJ: And what are these trucks that say Esparza trucking--

CH: --trucking.

S23: Oh, one of my, my husband's cousins who went to live in Montana, he was retired or disabled and he started doing these toy trucks and he sent one to my hus--the first one, this one--and he wrote Esparza trucking. My husband was a truck driver.

MJ: Oh, he was.

S23: And um, uh, so then after that we, everyone wanted one and so he, actually my husband sent him money and he sent those two. I have one in my bedroom and they're so darling.

CH: They're great!

S23: I just love them! And my son says, "I want one of them," I don't know how to divide them. I said well, I have another one in my bedroom that's a little pick-up and that one also says, it says Esparza enterprises (giggles).

CH: That's great.

S23: But most of my brother-in-laws are truck drivers, you know, big rig drivers. That's what my husband did. It's just great. So, I, I had them in a box and I took them out, I said well, I want to enjoy them, even though it adds more things to my house. But I, I, they're, they're special, I let everyone enjoy them.

CH: Yeah, they're pretty cool. I like them.

S23: Yeah. He died, he died two years after my husband did and I never, I didn't get to see him again.

CH: Well, it's great how everybody seems to have an artistic talent around you.

S23: Thank you, I think so.

CH: (to child) What's your talent? (we laugh)

Child: Um, grandma, can I go with the girls?

S23: Did they ask you? No?

Child: No, I just wanted to go with them and see.

S23: Uh, where's your Tio? Javier?

Child: He's over there in the restroom.

S23: Okay, come around him and ask, and ask. I don't know. He's the one driving and I don't know if there's room.

Child: I'll tell him after, I'll just sit right here.

S23: Okay. Just come around. Yeah, she didn't go to school today.

CH: They all did her hair.

S23: That little nacimiento was in my uncle's apartment. My uncle was murdered. He lived downtown LA. He had been there for over 18 years. He never married after the service, he didn't go back to Chicago where he was from, he stayed in Los Angeles and, and uh, since after the war, World War II, and he was very, like I said, a very good painter, but he was disabled from the war and uh when we were called that he was killed, well, my mother was next of kin, but she couldn't go, she was in a wheel chair, so my, my aunt from Chicago came down and he had very few things, you know, very humble, little one room apartment. And most of the furniture, a friend of his, gave it to a friend of his. And he had, two things that was very touching for me because he had been out of touch with my mother for many years. He would only come and visit her on her birthday, once in a while other times, and he went a couple of years without seeing her, but you know they'd talk on the phone--

CH: --yeah--

S23: And he, she never, he said, "well, I should go visit you," oh no, no! I don't want you to visit me out here; who knows what happened, you know, what his life style was. But I thought he was removed from, you know, from the family and, and the culture, but he had this nacimiento, it was really dusty, and it really touched me, and my aunt said, "is

there anything you want?" I just want that. So that's, that's a special one. So he had his nacimiento. He had a Lady of Guadalupe, yeah.

MJ: Right there on the corner?

S23: A Lady of Guadalupe that was cut out of, was pasted on some wrapping paper, a Christmas wrapping paper and he had that on the wall, and a Mexican sun, but he had other things that, you know, that were, but he never, I thought, gosh this tells me he never left his, hi, his heritage no matter if didn't look like he did. They looked very old. He must have had it for a long time. And those kind that were, were done in the forties, thirties and forties, that style, so it's a little--

CH: --So it's antique.

S23: yeah, it is.

CH: It's nice.

S23: So, besides nacimientos and Guadalupes, angels and hearts and pictures. If you would like to see some of my prints, I'll show you.

MJ: Surely.

S23: Okay. I, I don't know if you can see in there. I have a Guadalupe that I painted for my mother, for one of her birthdays. This was in 1979. Put my, put my stuff there. I have problems with storage cuz' I don't have any room around here so I keep things in portfolios flat--it takes up a lot of room. I don't have a light in here so I, I think your, maybe your light will illuminate it enough.

MJ: Probably.

CH: I'll grab one end.

S23: This one doesn't have a glass so you could see this one. This is Guadalupe. I only have about four of five oils that I did. When I was, during the seventies, my chi, I was, my children were still little, um, I stated exploring oils, but it was very expensive so I didn't continue. So I went back to pencil and watercolors. But this is, I painted it on a piece of, of muslin and then I laminated it to a piece of burlap and I did that in 1971, I believe. And it was in her house, after she died of course, it's mine again.

MJ: Okay.

S23: These are watercolors and that's a, all of these are watercolors, that's why they're in here in this. They took my light off, they were gonna fix it and I don't have a light in there.

MJ: Mmhh, it's okay.

S23: This is called heart lines it's a watercolor. And this one my, it's really for my sister now, she wants it. She wanted to buy it and I said, "no, just, I waste, just exchange something." This one is called a girasol and um, uh, let's see, I don't know if you can see in here, it's kind of hard with especially the angle. This is one of those that faded quite a bit so I, I just haven't taken it out. It did have a lot of yellow, sunlight colors, but it, it, it faded considerably. She was much darker. I call this, I think I call it, what was it, waiting, but it was in Spanish--

CH: --esperando?--

S23: Esperanza. So it kind of has a double meaning. It could be her and, and a hope of window (inaudible). This is, I've done this icon a couple of ways. This is a watercolor and crayon resist and it's a, it's a seedling of a corn seedling, but in Spanish it's "Simientos de Maiz" and it's, it's taken from a petroglyph of corn, corn icon.

CH: That's cute.

S23: I guess you can say that corn is also important to me (laughs)! I'll put this one out there. I just got this one back from, in fact it was in a gallery, but I have these four, let's see--

CH: Do you want me to help you with anything?

S23: Yeah, we'll put 'em out there, because there's more light out there.

CH: Do you want me to bring this one, this large one?

S23: Yeah, that one is gonna go into an exhibit tomorrow, they're gonna pick it up. I haven't painted anything the last year or so, but they're willing to take something that's--but it's for a theme. I wonder what, I don't know if it's dusty. This is another maguey concept. She's Mayahuel, the goddess of cor--of maguey and she is the deity of life giving sustance, sustenance rather, the pulque. And so it was a sacred drink and she's Mayahuel.

CH: There's a legend that goes with her, I can't remember it right now.

S23: You know I just found a book at, when I was in Ensenada I went into a bookstore and they had all these artes de mexico and it was only $16. The ones I have, I have only a few. They're excellent publications and they always have one theme and I think they're published either bimonthly, yeah. And it's an old, old established publication, "Artes de Mexico," and so the theme on this one is el maguey so I bought it. But here, I bought they're $30 and more. Single issues and their back issues sometimes I found them for $25 so I don't have very many only if I have to have something. And so here I found this one. (phone rings)

MJ: You wanna get that?

S23: Excuse me.